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The summer sun may be shining now, but local writer Sam Bevard can already feel a chill in the air as he investigates the subject for his latest Halloween tale.

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Local News

Thirty years of salsa-making behind product now appearing stores

By **DANETTA BARKER** Staff Writer

Thursday, June 8, 2006 9:08 PM EDT

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FLEMINGSBURG -- Fiery salsa is heating up Fleming County as a local man makes the tomato delight available to the public.

Larry Hill, better known as Poppie to five little granddaughters, has been making salsa for 30 years. It was only three months ago that he began marketing his homemade salsa to area stores. Now the jars with Poppie in a sombrero can be found in nearly a dozen counties.

Although he won't release his recipe, Hill does have a few guidelines to pass along to those who make salsa at home.

"To really get that fresh state, use fresh ingredients," Hill said. "And we still chop ours by hand."

"We" includes his wife, Brenda, and daughter, Melissa. When the vegetables are at their peak, the three gather at a commercial kitchen at a local church and make salsa. He said that peppers can be chopped with a food processor, but tomatoes need hand chopping to make them taste the best.

The best tomatoes, which he grew in his garden years ago, he now buys from local farmers.

"Darrell Doyle grows Mountain Spring tomatoes that are perfect for salsa," Hill said.

Perfect peppers are also required for Poppie's salsa. Hill uses jalapeno peppers



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and other varieties that are secret to his recipe.

"I make 24 pints per batch," Hill said. "It takes me about two hours for each batch."

He sells the salsa in pint jars, 12 per case. He just received one order for nine cases, which he said was his biggest order yet.

The salsa can be purchased at Ken's New Market in Flemingsburg, Yoder's and Santa CeCialis Mexican Grocery in Maysville and Jones market Dinner Bell in May's Lick.

"We ship some to Manchester, Ohio, too," he said.

Although the current recipe is secret, Hill experimented several years before refining his salsa. He began with left over vegetables from his own garden, which he used to make taco sauce. His wife suggested a thicker chunkier sauce for dipping. He began to make salsa in an abundance that led to gifts for friends and family.

"People love it," Hill said. "Some tell me they use it for cooking. One woman uses it on pork roast."

The recipes for dishes made with Poppie's Salsa can be found on a new Web site that is under construction.

The salsa led Hill back to school where he works with the Philip French and Vo-Ag program at Nicholas County High School. The students want to grow the tomatoes and peppers, which Hill would buy from them to use in his salsa.

"I want to work with the schools," Hill said. "I would like to develop a model program that could be used across the state to teach students about growing, harvesting and marketing produce."

Hill participates in the Kentucky Proud program which helps local farmers market their produce. The logo appears on Poppie's Salsa labels, which was approved by state officials before being placed on jars.

The trip to the market for Hill was a long journey, but a very educational one. He learned that he had to have his salsa tested in a state laboratory in Louisville.

"They found that I needed to increase the amount of vinegar to meet state code," Hill said.

As Hill talks about his salsa, his accent is not local and he admits he grew up in southern Missouri before he headed out on a career in ministry.

"I met my wife at a youth rally and she is from Flemingsburg," Hill said. "We traveled with the ministry for many years, but when we wanted to settle down, we bought a house here."

His roots might not be in the tobacco-rich heritage of Fleming County, but his salsa is establishing its own roots in the same soil.



Larry Hill tastes his famous Poppie's Salsa made in Flemingsburg. He has recently begun to sell the product in markets around the area.
Danetta Barker/Staff

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